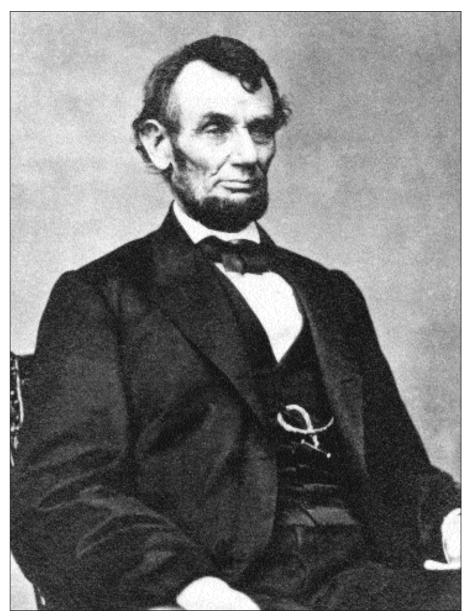
LANE AND LINCOLN



President Abraham Lincoln.

by Craig Miner

t first glance, the contrast between Abraham Lincoln, the
sainted president martyred
at Ford's Theater in 1865, and
James H. Lane, the wild haired, some said
mad, senator who committed suicide in
1866 in a hay field near his home in
Kansas, seems too extreme to admit of
much of an understanding, not to say relationship, between the two. Yet many
contemporaries and some historians saw
a more than casual tie between the men
and commented on it.

Interpretations range from viewing the Lane/Lincoln connection as a series of savvy temporary political accommodations, to regarding it as incorporating a constant and sinister Swengalian influence exerted by Lane on Lincoln. These differences in analysis reflect Lane's variety of impact on those who observed him, which in turn derived both from the breadth and flexibility of his personality

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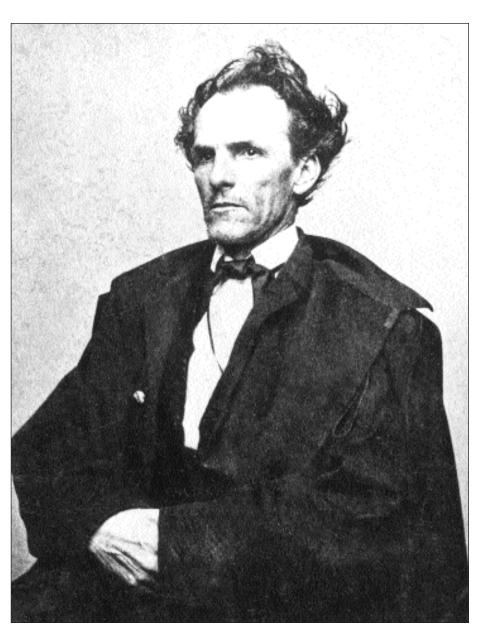
A Mysterious Connection

and from a certain thespian demeanor.¹ A late-twentieth-century journalist commented that Lane "was a man of so many sides, no one—save perhaps Lincoln—knew which was real."²

Also contributing to the extremes of speculation about Lane is that only a handful of letters from him have survived. This was not because he was illiterate, as was sometimes said during his life, but probably because he was so controversial that both he and his correspondents found it politic to destroy his missives.

There were clear life similarities between Lane and Lincoln. They were about the same age: Lincoln was born in 1809, Lane in 1814. Both spent a good piece of their youth in Indiana. Both served in the federal House of Representatives. Both loved a good story, told one well, and did not hesitate at some risqué humor. Both, in quite different ways, were riveting orators, sensitive to the moods of crowds.

The two also interacted in significant public ways. They met through Lincoln's relative Mark Delahay in Kansas during Lincoln's campaign tour here in 1859. Lane aided Lincoln on the stump and at the conventions in the presidential campaigns of 1860 and 1864. Lane and his Kansas Frontier Guard physically occupied the White House early in the administration to protect Lincoln. Lincoln threw



U.S. Senator James H. Lane.

^{1.} John Hay diary entry April 19, 1868, in Lincoln and the Civil War in the Diaries and Letters of John Hay, ed. Tyler Dennett (New York: Dodd, Mead and Co., 1939), 287.

^{2. &}quot;James H. Lane saw life as a duel," *Lawrenceburg* (Illinois) *Journal-Press*, June 23, 1981, "Tear Sheets from Various Magazines" pamphlets, vol. 1, no. 39, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

much patronage Lane's way and supported his ambition for a swashbuckling type of military glory, both in the face of much opposition from the senator's Kansas enemies. Lane early advised Lincoln to arm and recruit black soldiers, issue the Emancipation Proclamation, and institute a "total war" policy, advice that impacted policy.³

Overall, there was a pattern, not of uncontrolled influence—Lincoln was aware of Lane's politically unacceptable radicalism—but of consultation, equanimity, and mutual respect and interest. Given Lane's reputation as an irresponsible demagogue, this was a surprise and a concern to many. Two persons near to Lincoln's daily life, his secretaries John Hay and William Stoddard, both of whom disliked and feared Lane, put the Kansas senator regularly in a position close enough to be dangerous to the president. Lincoln himself commented to a governor of Kansas, Thomas Carney, who was pressing the president in a hostile way about his relationship with Lane: "He knocks at my door every morning. You know he is a very persistent fellow, and hard to put off."

True, standard biographies of Lincoln offer little suggestion of any special Lane/Lincoln connection. David Donald's *Lincoln* contains three Lane references in seven hundred pages.⁵ Carl Sandburg in 1939 referred to the Kansas senator as the "swaggering gun-fighting Jim Lane of Kansas" and put him at an extreme among supporters upon whom Lincoln might call.⁶ Given that Lane letters are not present in Lincoln's correspondence any more than they are in the papers of those upon whom we know he had massive influence, this is not surprising. Those closer to the events, more focused on Lane, and with access to those who knew him, tended to make more of the relationship. Historian Leverett Spring wrote in 1898 in the first scholarly study of Lane, published in the *American*

Historical Review: "If Mr. Lincoln conferred upon Lane powers such as no other senator either possessed or desired, the latter was able to make substantial returns for the unprecedented favors which he had received."

Students of Kansas history recently have been influenced on the Lane/Lincoln question by the views of Charles Robinson, Kansas's first governor, and by the powerfully written contrast between Robinson and Lane, much to the disadvantage of Lane, at the opening of chapter two of Albert Castel's A Frontier State at War (1958). Surely the real Lane was different—more complex, less irresponsible, and more useful to Lincoln than the "madman" image he sometimes publicly and purposefully projected. John Brown impressed Emerson and Thoreau. Lane too was effective with eminently steady-minded people, and weighing subtle aspects of the Lane/Lincoln relationship requires analysis of dynamics well below the surface.

Robinson was Lane's political opponent and personal enemy. More odd, considering that he was a Republican governor, was that he was an enemy of Lincoln. This led Lincoln to bypass Robinson in administering federal affairs in Kansas in favor of Lane, who, while flighty, was at least a consistent opportunist and not an anti-Lincoln ideologue.8 The feeling of being unjustly passed over, combined with the "quarreler" in Robinson's temperament, which eventually led him to change parties twice, increased the governor's enmity toward the president.9 Robinson wrote in 1863: "the President is a poor weak man used by demagogues of the most worthless & corrupt character," and went on to say that "if Genl. Lee would take the President & Secretary [of War] prisoners . . . I think we would be the gainers, even though Washington was lost at the same time."10 It was not politic for Lincoln to arm such a man with the patronage.

^{3.} For the basic facts of Lane's biography, see John Speer, Life of Gen. James H. Lane "The Liberator of Kansas" (Garden City, Kans.: 1896); Leverett Spring, "The Career of a Kansas Politician," American Historical Review 4 (October 1898): 80–104; William E. Connelley, James Henry Lane: "The Grim Chieftain" of Kansas (Topeka: Crane and Co., 1899); Wendell H. Stephenson, The Political Career of General James Lane (Topeka: Kansas State Historical Society, 1930); Kendall Bailles, Rider on the Wind: Jim Lane and Kansas (Shawnee Mission, Kans.: Wagon Wheel Press, 1962).

^{4.} Leverett Spring, Kansas: The Prelude to the War for the Union (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin and Co., 1885), 274.

^{5.} David Donald, *Lincoln* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1995), 298, 439, 481

^{6.} Carl Sandburg, *Abraham Lincoln: The War Years*, vols. 1–4 (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1939), 2: 644; 3: 76.

^{7.} Spring, "The Career of a Kansas Politician," 101.

^{8.} See Harry Carman and Rinhard Luthin, Lincoln and the Patronage (New York: Columbia University Press, 1943).

^{9.} The standard modern biography is Don Wilson, *Governor Charles Robinson of Kansas* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1975); *see also* Robinson's own memoir, *The Kansas Conflict* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1892).

^{10.} Charles Robinson to A. A. Lawrence, June 27, 1863, History University of Kansas, Charles and Sara T. D. Robinson Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

It can be argued that the "mad" Lane was more like Lincoln than was the "austere" Robinson. The difference was that Robinson was a subtler dissembler and had a more dignified air about him. Early writers on Kansas history tended to be partisans of Brown and Lane, while those coming after the publication of Robinson's *The Kansas Conflict* (1892) and the subsequent Libby Custer-like campaign of his widow, Sara, with her wealth and influence, on behalf of her husband's reputation, switched to Robinson as hero.¹¹

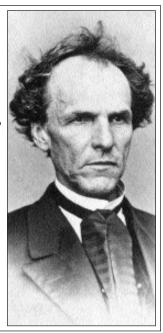
Robinson was livid about Lane, describing the man he blamed along with John Brown for escalating the Kansas struggle into violence, as almost feral, "pawing the earth, beating the air and bellowing . . . like a bull of Bashan." Lane was, Robinson thought, "destitute of principles or convictions of any kind." Robinson thought Lane corrupted all who touched him and had corrupted Lincoln. "To know that this man [Lane], who was constantly plotting against the peace of his own state," Robinson wrote in 1889, "was sustained at Washington by the president was most disheartening and discouraging, and when the full history of his course relating to Kansas affairs shall be written, it will cause a stain upon his [Lincoln's] otherwise honorable name that will not out."

The clear interest of Robinson in getting at the otherwise unassailable reputation of Lincoln through Lane, while attacking Lane at the same time, tends to discredit his charges about the relationship. However, exaggeration does not belie core truth. Others picked up the theme. Lane's law partner, James Christian, wrote that Lane's influence in Washington showed that "poor President Lincoln was but a man subject to like passions as the rest of us, subject to flattery and coercion." University of Kansas professor Frank Blackmar wrote in 1902 that how the "great and good President of the United States should have been so subject to the wiles of Lane is one of the mysteries connected with Kansas affairs that are yet to be explained." 14

11. The historiography on John Brown, whose reputation was eclipsed in much the way Lane's was, and for some of the same reasons, is traced in detail in James Malin, *John Brown and the Legend of Fifty-Six* (Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 1942).

12. Robinson, The Kansas Conflict, 365, 377.

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The early "white legend" of Lane's influence on Lincoln was tied as closely to his political ally in life, John Speer, as the "black legend" was to Robinson. Yet here, too, the fact that there was an important relationship between Lincoln and Lane was not questioned.

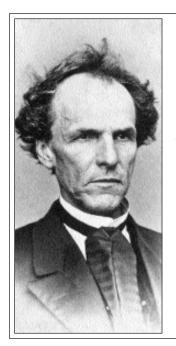
Speer's *Life of Gen. James H. Lane "The Liberator of Kansas"* (1896) portrayed Lane as a misunderstood figure who died early and was pilloried by his enemies in later years. Lane's killing of Gaius Jenkins, another territorial leader, was, for example, in Speer's view and that of every serious historian who has looked at it since, hardly so simple as the story that crazy Lane shot a man trying to get water from his own well and then talked his way out of a murder rap. Lane *was* acquitted of the crime of murder, and fortunately, Speer wrote, the government kept records of the trial. Lane was as unpopular with politicians as with military officers, Speer claimed, but beloved of the people. "Falsehood," Speer wrote, "will travel a mile while truth is getting on its boots." ¹⁵

President Buchanan in 1857 denounced the citizens of Kansas as a lawless people "in rebellion against the government, with a military leader at their head of most turbulent and dangerous character." Lane himself replied to

15. Speer, Life of Gen. James H. Lane, 196-205.

^{13.} Charles Robinson, Speech to Commander and Members of the Loyal Legion, January 3, 1889, History University of Kansas, Robinson Collection.

^{14.} Frank Blackmar, *The Life of Charles Robinson, The First State Governor of Kansas* (Topeka: Crane and Co., 1902), 275.



Lane "had a sinister face, plain to ugliness, but he could talk away his face in twenty minutes."

that in detail, saying that that message, the predecessor of so many similar characterizations of him, "stands without a parallel in its falsification of history." Speer reproduced that Lane speech in detail, rather than relying on anecdotes of the "Grim Chieftain's" appearance or delivery. He thought scholars would agree with him in calling it a "cool, calm, discreet reply, in a trying crisis." Lane was president of the Leavenworth Constitutional Convention in 1858. That gathering, Speer says, "instead of being composed of wild, impracticable men," contained "twenty members of more ability as statesmen than the Governor himself; and we compliment him in making the number so small."

In Speer's view the demonization of Lane began with the move of the federal government and Democratic Party against a Kansas resisting ratification of the Lecompton Constitution, and it escalated due to Robinson's ambition and colorful tirades by others of Lane's political enemies. Senator John Ingalls was an articulate man who scarcely knew Lane but who memorably said of him that "had he been running for office in Hindostan, he would have thrown his offspring to the crocodiles of the Ganges, or bowed among the Parsees at the shrine of the sun" for success. Speer argues that Lane was no more inconsistent, dishonest, or opportunistic than Ingalls was, but some of the best phrasemakers in the business made oratorical hay at

his expense.¹⁶ The writings of Noble Prentice and Verres Smith on Lane, which Speer would have known, or the later (1942) comments of W. G. Clugston in *Rascals in Democracy* would have confirmed further the suspicion about eloquence of description tending to fix a false impression.¹⁷

Speer was not the only defender of Lane in the nineteenth century. Albert Dean Richardson in his 1867 account Beyond the Mississippi wrote that Lane, whom he met in Kansas, seemed at first a "transparent demagogue" but engendered great support from Kansans with a "personal magnetism that was wonderful." Richardson thought Lane was "an anomaly of our civilization. No other country could have produced him; our own never saw his parallel."18 Sidney Clarke, a U.S. representative from Kansas who had known Lane since 1859, wrote of him favorably in 1879. "When other men hesitated, he went forward with faith and courage." He was, Clarke thought, "a comprehensive statesman, and his breadth of vision was as wide as the world in which he lived. . . . There was but little hypocrisy in his nature. His faults were as conspicuous as his talents were brilliant."19 Reeder M. Fish, himself a delegate to the 1858 Leavenworth Constitutional Convention, wrote in a series of articles in the Baldwin, Kansas, newspaper, later published in a pamphlet, that it would take a Homer or Shakespeare to immortalize Jim Lane adequately.²⁰

ven as the twentieth-century writing on Kansas history turned to the Robinson model, Lane continued to have his defenders of a kind who did not expect moral perfection but admired effectiveness. William Connelley admitted Lane's faults but said his contributions far outweighed them and that he was a man for the times. "It

16. Ibid., 153-59, 161-62, 185, 302-3.

18. Albert Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi* (Hartford, Conn.: American Publishing Co., 1867), 44–45.

19. Sidney Clarke, "Lane of Kansas," *Kansas City Journal*, September 14, 1879, in "Kansas Reminiscences" clippings, vol. 1, 161–200, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

20. Reeder M. Fish, *The Grim Chieftain of Kansas, and Other Free-State Men in Their Struggles Against Slavery* (Cherryvale, Kans.: Clarion Book and Job Print, 1885), 1.

^{17.} See Jacob Stringfellow [Verres N. Smith], "Jim Lane," Lippincott's Magazine 5 (March 1870): 266–78; Noble Prentice, "Jim Lane," in Kansas Miscellanies (Topeka: Kansas Publishing House, 1888), 116–29; R. G. Clugston, Rascals in Democracy (New York: Peter R. Smith, 1940), 62–70.

may be set down as a truth almost beyond dispute," Connelley concluded, "that most movements for reformation and advancement in human progress are led first by men, or women, supposed to be erratic and eccentric if not insane. The sunlight first lights up the craggy mountaintop."21 Wendell Stephenson's scholarly account in 1930 portrayed Lane as a consistent loyalist for Kansas and believed in his influence with Lincoln. Stephenson quoted the Leavenworth Daily Conservative from 1865 stating, "the President at one time told us that while he was compelled to dissent from General Lane's radical views, he had the highest respect for them, and that circumstances had more than once compelled him to adopt and follow them." Stephenson thought there was "an element of truth" in Robinson's statement that Lincoln "believes nothing from Kansas unless it is first indorsed [sic] by General Lane."22

No historian, however, did more to establish a balanced view of Lane in a style accessible to the public than Lloyd Lewis. Lewis met *Emporia Gazette* editor William Allen White in Chicago in 1939 and spoke with him about Lane, who was "a mutual favorite of our lives—and apparently of nobody else's." White was president of the Kansas State Historical Society that year and invited Lewis to speak there. The address he gave, "The Man the Historians Forgot," did more to interpret the real Lane than anything written before or since.²³

Lewis made the point that Lane had been treated unfairly by history. "Where a man stands in history," Lewis said, "depends upon who keeps the record; more than that, it depends upon who lives to keep the record." There were, he said, "for the sake of objectivity . . . still too many midland biographers and historians and professors blandly adopting the historical viewpoints of New England—a natural thing, perhaps, for men whose dream it is to be called some day to a full professorship at Harvard."

To these types Lane was strongly unattractive, and they failed to grasp his peculiar genius. Lane was no minister of the gospel, but neither was he a Satan in coonskin. He was a practical man who loved Kansas and freedom. And he was an ally of Lincoln, who at least at one time in his life, perhaps before he went through what historian Michael Burlingame characterizes as a mid-life adjustment, had a good deal of the Lane-type manipulative politician in him. "Lincoln is martyred," Lewis concluded, "and goes into history too noble, too exalted to be linked any more with Jim Lane, who committed suicide. Yet, when both were living, Lane may be said to have been President Lincoln's political viceroy in Kansas, and sometimes, perhaps, in the whole regions west of the Mississippi river."

Lewis focused upon an important general truth about the source of the relationship between Lane and Lincoln—Lane's usefulness to Lincoln in many ways. At the center of that was Lane's attractiveness as a person and an orator to the masses if not to insiders. Whether on the stump or simply sitting across a table from his interlocutor, Lane was a memorable personality—a presence so powerful that some were said to comment they avoided him for fear of being "charmed out of their principles." That presence is difficult to communicate across time. "He who would resurrect the 'Grim Chieftain' from the books, newspapers and manuscripts of the State Historical Society," Noble Prentis wrote late in the 1880s, "will fail. He will obtain nothing more satisfactory than a dry, eyeless mummy." 25

Lane charmed no more by physical beauty than did Lincoln. He was odd looking, ugly even. Prentis summarized: "He looked like nobody else. His picture in the State Historical Society's collection does not look like any of the others there. His hair stands out in every direction.... The mouth suggests imprecations and nicotine, the eyes anything you like." A reporter described Lane as "long," and "eely-shaped," with a "careless, loose-hung look," and "not an especially open countenance." Richardson observed that he "had a sinister face, plain to ugliness, but he could talk away his face in twenty minutes."

He often wore a buffalo or seal skin coat, a fur cap, a waistcoat made of cowhide with the hair out, and high topped boots. When speaking, he removed pieces of his at-

^{21.} Connelley, James Henry Lane, 101.

^{22.} Stephenson, *Political Career of James H. Lane*, 141–42, 164–65.

^{23.} Lloyd Lewis, "The Man the Historians Forgot," Kansas Historical Quarterly 8 (February 1939): 85–87, 93.

^{24.} *Michael Burlingame, The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1994), 92–93.Lewis, "The Man the Historians Forgot, 88.

^{25.} Prentis, "Jim Lane," 117.

^{26.} Ibid., 122; Allan Bogue, *The Earnest Men: Republicans of the Civil War Senate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1981), 42; Richardson, *Beyond the Mississippi*, 45.

tire. But neither the dress nor the manner was consistent. Verres Smith wrote in 1870: "Like that versatile . . . mud turtle of Negro superstition, he contained within his shell the flavor of every creature dear to the palate of man—fish, flesh or fowl. . . . In Kansas he wore the fells of wild beasts: in Boston he appeared in black broadcloth and white cravat, and whined through his nose."

But all agreed that, whether whining in broadcloth or shouting in cowhide, as a speaker Lane was a marvel. Ingalls respected that. He described Lane's speechmaking as "voluble and incessant, without logic, learning, rhetoric or grace," delivered in a voice that was "a series of transitions from the broken scream of a maniac to the hoarse, rasping guttural of a Dutch butcher in the last gasp of inebriation." His diction "was a pudding of slang, profanity and solecism," yet "the electric shock of his extraordinary eloquence thrilled."28 Lane could grit and grind his teeth at an opponent in a way that could be heard in the back rows. He would close his teeth together and talk through them with a hissing sound that would make the flesh crawl, only to speak a moment later in mellow manner that would bring tears. Connelley thought Lane's effectiveness as a speaker came from psychological insight and sympathy with common people—from having "experienced the emotions common to every heart"—and from unerring intuition. He probably spoke mostly extemporaneously, eyes on the audience rather than his text. People in the audience often shouted out questions or comments, to which Lane would respond. The hearers of Ingalls's speeches, Connelley wrote, were "filled with wonder," while those listening to Lane were "choked with the intensity of aggression," and moved to act.29

here were many memorable occasions with Lane on the platform, but one most often singled out was a speech he gave in Chicago as he was swinging east to raise sympathy for Kansas after the sacking of Lawrence by Border Ruffians in the spring of 1856. Thomas Wentworth Higginson heard him then and wrote: "Never did I hear such a speech; every sentence like a pistol bullet; such delicacy and lightness of touch; such natural art; such perfect adaptation; not a word, not a gesture could have been altered; he had every nerve in his audience at the end of his muscles; not a man in the United States could have done it; and the perfect ease of it all, not a glimpse of premeditation or effort, and yet he had slept in his boots every night but two for five weeks."30 Lane's Chicago address raised fifteen thousand dollars for Kansas. When the talk was over gamblers threw their pistols on the stage and begged Lane to take them west. Businessmen threw their purses, newsboys tossed pennies, women wept, and people milled around the platform in a high state of agitation.31 No politician, especially the embattled Lincoln, could afford to ignore that kind of charisma.

That Lane was so effective is especially curious because of the regularity with which he changed his views. He had been a Democrat, son of a Democratic congressman from Indiana. He had been the "wheelhorse" of Stephen Douglas and had voted for the Kansas–Nebraska bill at a time when its repeal of the Missouri Compromise and substitution of the doctrine of popular sovereignty upset freesoilers. And he had grown up, he often admitted in his speeches, thinking that slavery was a perfectly justifiable institution.³²

The traditional explanation of his conversion to free-state principals in Kansas was pure political expediency. However, there is the alternative that he, as happened to some of the Democratic governors sent to Kansas by the Pierce administration (Andrew Reeder is a good example), underwent a genuine sea change in his attitude. If that happened, it may be that, like late converts to a certain religion or former drunks who circulated as temperance speakers, Lane's zeal for the cause was all the greater because he had once been a sinner. That was *his* explanation. As was true of many, Lane did not believe in racial equali-

^{27.} Kansas City Star, May 25, 1913; Stringfellow, "Jim Lane," 267–68.

^{28. &}quot;Kansas: 1541–1891," in *Collected Writings of John James Ingalls: Essays, Addresses, and Orations*, ed. William E. Connelley (Kansas City: Hudson-Kimberly Publishing Co., 1902), 455; Clugston, *Rascals in Democracy* 66

^{29.} William E. Connelley, "The Lane–Jenkins Claim Contest," *Kansas Historical Collections*, 1923–1925 16 (1925): 22; Connelley, "Daniel W. Wilder, the Father of Kansas History and Literature," ibid., 1–21.

^{30.} Quotation in Oswald Garrison Villard, *John Brown*, 1800–1859: A Biography Fifty Years After (Boston: Riverside Press, 1910), 225.

^{31.} Lewis, "The Man the Historians Forgot," 99.

^{32.} Speeches of Hon. James H. Lane in the Cooper Institute, New York (Washington, D.C.: William H. Moore, 1864), in "Kansas Collected Speeches and Pamphlets," vol. 14, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

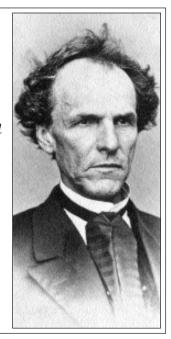
ty and voted for a clause in a proposed Kansas constitution that would ban free blacks from Kansas. But none who heard him speak against the evils of the institution of slavery doubted his sincerity.³³ "Let slavery lift its crest in the air," he told his troops in 1861, "and here I solemnly vow, that if Jim Lane is compelled to add a note to such an infernal chorus, he breaks his sword and quits the field." The institution was, he said, "an emanation from hell."³⁴

Lane used his skills for Lincoln directly, as well as for the cause. George Deitzler, an enemy of Lane, wrote in 1860 that Lane was going east and "expects to howl frightfully against Democracy & in favor of 'Old Abe' & so secure, if possible the confidence of that good man." In 1864, when Lincoln and Andrew Johnson ran on the contrived Union Party ticket, Lane was, according to contemporary observers, of pivotal importance. He had a private meeting with Lincoln the night before the preconvention caucus of the Grand Council of the Union League. Stoddard recorded the fact of the meeting in his diary but knew nothing of the content. The next day, amid "appalling charges" made against Lincoln, Lane gave an eloquent address:

I am speaking individually to each man here. Do you, sir, know in this broad land, and can you name to me, one man whom you could or would trust, before God, that he would have done better in this matter than Abraham Lincoln has done, and to whom you would be now more willing to trust the unforeseen emergency or peril which is to come? That unforeseen peril, that perplexing emergency, that step in the dark, is right before us, and we are here to decide by whom it should be made for the Nation. Name your other man.³⁷

It appears that neither Lincoln nor his secretary thought it was necessary to buy the whole Lane package to appreciate him where he shined.

Lane could grit and grind his teeth at an opponent in a way that could be heard in the back rows.



Another clear use of Lane to Lincoln was Lane's military background and his aggressive attitude toward field operations. Lincoln saw to it that Lane was appointed a brigadier general of volunteers in 1861, an action unprecedented for a sitting U.S. senator. This led to a call for an explanation both from Kansas governor Robinson, who sent a replacement senator to Washington in response to that action, and from the Senate itself, which asked Lincoln for papers concerning the appointment.

Lincoln definitely initiated the appointment, showing an appreciation of Lane's qualities. He wrote Secretary of War Simon Cameron in June 1861 that he had been thinking about their conversation concerning Lane. "I have been reflecting upon the subject, and have concluded that we need the services of such a man out there at once; that we better appoint him a brigadier-general of volunteers to-day, and send him off with such authority to raise a force . . . as you think will get him into actual work quickest. Tell him when he starts to put it through, not to be writing or telegraphing here, but put it through."³⁸

^{33.} Charles Robinson, "Topeka and Her Constitution," Speech before Kansas State Historical Society, 1877, History University of Kansas, Robinson Collection.

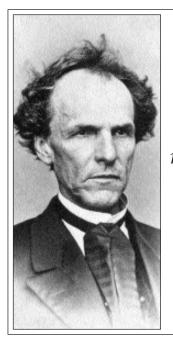
^{34.} Speeches of Gen. J. H. Lane of Kansas (Washington: McGill and Witherow, n.d.), 4, 8, in "Kansas Collected Speeches and Pamphlets," vol. 9.

^{35.} George Deitzler to S. N. Wood, August 18, 1860, box 1, Samuel Wood Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

^{36.} William Stoddard, *Inside the White House: Memoirs and Reports of Lincoln's Secretary*, ed. Michael Burlingame (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 136.

^{37.} W. O. Stoddard, "The Story of a Nomination," North American Review 138 (March 1884): 270–73.

^{38.} Abraham Lincoln to Simon Cameron, June 20, 1861, in *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, ed. Roy Basler, vol. 4 (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953), 414.



"The conduct of the forces under Lane . . . has done more for the enemy than could have been accomplished by 20,000 of his own army."

As questions about Lane's field command arose, and complaints poured in from regular officers that Lane's type of irregular presence and procedure was helping the enemy, Lane raided Osceola, Missouri (September 1861), and planned a "Great Jayhawker" expedition into Indian Territory and Texas. There he was to command ten thousand Kansas troops, including blacks, and four thousand Indians.³⁹

Lane thought the South needed to be hit hard on its vulnerable western flank, and he hated the caution and the fuss and feathers of the West Point officers. In the Senate he favored abolishing the academy at West Point on the grounds that many graduates from there lacked common sense. "There is no board of examination," he said, "to separate the stupid from those who have brains." Lincoln, frustrated with the inaction of General George McClellan, could sympathize. "I desired to surround the institution of Slavery with Free Territory," Lane wrote when returning to his Senate seat in February 1862, "and thus girdle the *cause*

of the rebellion itself. Without fault on my part as I believe, I have been thwarted in this, the cherished hope of my life." 40

Major General David Hunter, commanding the Department of Kansas, thought he would have trouble defending Kansas with his resources, much less invading Texas. And he was jealous and angry about being supplanted in command by Lane through presidential influence. Lane's units, a report said, were "a ragged, halfarmed, diseased, mutinous rabble taking votes as to whether troublous or distasteful orders should be obeyed." They made no reports or returns. 41 Hunter wrote his commanding officer that he thought Lane "has been trading in Washington on a capital partly made up of his own Senatorial position and partly of such scraps of influence as I may have possessed in the confidence or esteem of the President, said scraps having been 'jayhawked' by the Kansas Senator without due consent of the proper owner."42

Other commanders in the region were as negative about Lane in the field. General Henry Halleck wrote General McClellen in December 1861 that "the conduct of the forces under Lane . . . has done more for the enemy than could have been accomplished by 20,000 of his own army. I receive almost daily complaints of outrages by these men in the name of the United States." Governor Robinson complained that "what we have to fear, and do fear, is that Lane's Brigade will get up a war by going over the line, committing depredations, and then returning into our State."

Lincoln was of two minds about this. He liked Lane's audacity but could see the problems with disrupting the

^{39.} James Lane to John Fremont, September 24, 1861, in U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion: A Compilation of the Official Records of the Union and Confederate Armies*, 1st ser., vol. 3 (Washington, D.C.: Government Printing Office, 1893), 505.

^{40.} Lori Lisowski, "The Future of West Point: Senate Debates on the Military Academy During the Civil War," *Civil War History* 34 (March 1988): 9; J. H. Lane, on his return to the Senate, February 26, 1862, broadside, in "Kansas Historical Pamphlets," vol. 6, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

^{41.} Albert E. Castel, *Civil War Kansas: Reaping the Whirlwind* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1997), 77–80; Samuel Smith, "Kansas Troops in the Civil War," handwritten manuscript, April 17, 1897, Robinson Collection.

^{42.} David Hunter to H.W. Halleck, February 8, 1862, U.S. War Department, *The War of the Rebellion*, 1st ser., vol. 8, 830.

^{43.} H. W. Halleck to George McClellen, December 19, 1861, in ibid., 449; Charles Robinson to John Fremont, September 1861, in ibid., vol. 3: 468–69.

chain of command. He wrote in December 1861 that he was "sorry General Halleck is so unfavorably impressed with General Lane." He reminded Hunter, however, that "who does *something* at the head of one Regiment will eclipse him who does *nothing* at the head of a hundred."⁴⁴ Lincoln wrote a joint letter in February 1862 to Lane and Hunter, stating that he wanted to use both of them and "so far as possible, to personally oblige both." If Hunter could "consistently with the public service, and his own honor, oblige Gen. Lane, he will also oblige me." Hunter would not oblige. Lane went back to the Senate, and the expedition was canceled.⁴⁵

Lincoln's handling of the "Jayhawk Expedition" reenforces a key point about his relationship with Lane—that while he was influenced by the Kansas senator, he was never dominated by him. Occasionally he was annoyed with Lane and publicly crossed him. He wrote the two Kansas senators, Lane and Pomeroy, in 1864 that he wished they "would make a sincere effort to get out of the mood you are in. It does neither of you any good—it gives you the means of tormenting my life out of me and nothing else."46 On another occasion, one of the few where there is a verbatim account of an encounter between Lane and Lincoln, Lincoln met with Lane and a delegation from Kansas and Missouri in the East Room of the White House shortly after the Quantrill raid on Lawrence. The delegation demanded the removal of General John Schofield, whom it blamed for allowing the raid. John Hay recorded that Lane spoke out "boisterously," asking if Lincoln thought it sufficient cause for the removal of a general that he had lost the confidence of the people. Not if he lost it unjustly, Lincoln said. Lane responded: "General Schofield has lost that confidence." To which Lincoln replied: "You being judge!" Gideon Welles once in another context recorded in his diary that Lincoln was not about to adopt uncritically Lane's personal quarrels as his own.⁴⁷

Lincoln could see beyond the surface, however, and was patient with flaws. "I believe. . . those Radicals will carry the State [of Kansas], "Lincoln once told Hay, "& I do not object to it. They are nearer to me than the other side in thought and sentiment, They are utterly lawless—the unhandiest devils in the world to deal with — but after all their faces are set Zionwards." John Nicolay and Hay's biography of Lincoln noted that "Lincoln, recognizing Lane's great energy and influence in Kansas, had intended to make it a tributary to the Union cause, but he had no idea of giving him the superior direction of management." That seems an entirely accurate analysis.

here is no question that Lane was useful to Lincoln in the Senate. It is often forgotten that in Kansas Lane had become something of a railroad expert. The record of the Senate proceedings on the Pacific Railroad bill shows that Lane was a major player in advancing the various proposals for federal aid to that railroad, a key Republican initiative. "I feel," he said in 1862, "that every single branch you make to this main stream is like an additional rivulet that helps to make the main stream of a river." ⁵⁰

It may be said, too, that Lane had his uses as front man for both Lincoln and Robinson. He and the mob he could rouse were the hammer that they could threaten to loose if calmer tempers did not prevail in negotiations, maintaining all the while their own reputations as rational statesmen. The "wild fanaticism" had its appeal in Washington and Kansas when the negotiations of the "safe counselors" seemed to lead nowhere.⁵¹ Far from universally scorned as

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^{44.} Lincoln note, December 27, 1861, in Basler, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln*, 5: 80; Abraham Lincoln to David Hunter, December 31, 1861, in ibid., 84.

^{45.} Abraham Lincoln to David Hunter and James Lane, February 10, 1862, in ibid., 131. Extensive debates on the issue of Lane's serving as brigadier general and in the Senate are found in *Congressional Globe*, 37th Cong., 2d sess., 1861–1862, 32, pt. 1.

^{46.} Abraham Lincoln to Samuel Pomeroy, May 12, 1864, in Basler, The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln 7: 338.

^{47.} Michael Burlingame, ed., At Lincoln's Side: John Hay's Civil War Correspondence and Selected Writings (Carbondale: University of Southern Illinois Press, 2000), 57–64; Diary of Gideon Welles, Secretary of the Navy Under Lincoln and Johnson, vol. 2 (Boston: Houghton, Mifflin Co., 1911), 147.

^{48.} Burlingame, At Lincoln's Side, n. 239.

^{49.} John Nicolay and John Hay, *Abraham Lincoln*, vol. 5 (New York: American Historical Foundation, 1914), 84.

^{50.} Remarks of James Lane, June 19, 1862, Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2d sess., 1862, 32, pt. 3: 2805.

^{51.} Express (Buffalo, N.Y.), May 15, 1892, Sara Robinson Scrapbooks, vol. 6, Robinson Collection, Kansas Collection, University of KansasLibraries, Lawrence.

a moral chameleon, Lane was courted in his time as a necessary and popular type. He was, wrote Abelard Guthrie in his Washington diary in 1862, "a great lion here and his room is always filled with visitors; at this moment there is not a man in Washington more sought after."⁵²

In addition to these immediate pragmatic uses, another attraction between Lincoln and Lane was the senator's confidence and vision. He not only reacted to public opinion but had an ability to form it along lines he foresaw and then confidently championed. "I truly believe," he once said about some of his Kansas opponents, "that should God show his special providence here tonight, we should see in those starry heavens his hand, commanding us to kill these damned villains." ⁵³

In this he had a fine sense for the barely possible. Representative William Niblack of Indiana said of Lane: "I always conceived him cautious in devising his plans and mapping out his future life, but bold and resolute in the execution of those plans, never deterred by any dangers which seemed to threaten him personally or by any consequences which might result to him." Lane himself said: "As a citizen and a Senator, I have a right of criticizing the acts of Government; and I mean to exercise it with the full flush of truthful patriotism—kindly, but fearlessly, cordially, but searchingly." 55

Prominent among the visions Lane pushed with Lincoln was that of attaching the moral cause of freeing the slaves openly to the propaganda for the Union. Lincoln had constitutional scruples on that issue, but Lane, free of the overall responsibility and less inclined to legal technicalities, strongly illustrated the grandeur and inspiration such a move would add. ⁵⁶ He advised Lincoln to issue the Emancipation Proclamation almost from the beginning of the Civil War and advocated it himself in speeches in the spring of 1861, even amid threats of assassination. In an 1861 speech to his troops he said: "Let us be bold—in-

scribe 'freedom to all' upon our banners, and appear just what we are—the opponents of slavery." Antislavery, he said, must be the "watchword for our lips," and "a shibboleth for our banners." He would arm blacks, he told his Senate colleagues and cheering galleries. In 1862 he did so in Kansas, one of the first such experiments in the Union Army. He believed the war could not be prosecuted without a mission, something any "pot-house politician" knew, and this was it. 58

For all his enthusiasm for making slavery an issue, Lane, however, gave Lincoln credit for waiting for his Emancipation Proclamation until public opinion was better prepared. He recognized in this qualities that were not his, as Lincoln recognized such alien qualities in Lane. Lane said of Lincoln's patience on the emancipation issue: "From the establishment of this nation to the present time, the Hand of an all-wise Providence has been seen in directing our destinies. In doing this He has always furnished proper instruments." On the Senate floor Lane proclaimed: "Uniting prudence and firmness, wisdom and simplicity, integrity and sagacity, generosity and elasticity of spirit in a singular degree, with that practical knowledge of men and things which places him [Lincoln] head and shoulders above his peers for all the purposes of government," the president had piloted the ship of state through the greatest of storms.⁵⁹ Mendacity? Opportunism? Possibly, but of no amateur kind.

So there were such reasons of reasoned expediency for a bond between Lane and Lincoln, reasons involving loyalty, military experience and style, vision, and Lane's power as a convincer. But one may speculate responsibly that there was something else—a personal affinity based not only on common experience but upon a deeper understanding the two men shared.

It must be remembered that Lane in the flesh was a human being of warmth and sense, not simply the wild

^{52.} Abelard Guthrie diary, January 18, 1862, Abelard Guthrie Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

^{53.} Burlingame, The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln, 3, 13.

^{54.} Remarks of William Niblack, July 18, 1866, Congressional Globe, 39th Cong., 1st sess., 1866, 36, pt. 5: 3195.

^{55.} Remarks of James Lane, December 17, 1861, ibid., 37th Cong., 2d sess., 1861, 32, pt. 1: 110.

^{56.} On Lincoln's doubts, see Garry Wills, Lincoln at Gettysburg: The Words That Remade America (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1992), 144.

^{57.} Vindication of the Policy of the Administration. Speech of Hon. J.H. Lane, of Kansas (Washington, D.C.: Gibson Brothers, 1865), in "Kansas Collected Speeches and Pamphlets," vol. 9; Speeches of Gen. J.H. Lane of Kansas, 4; ibid., 11.

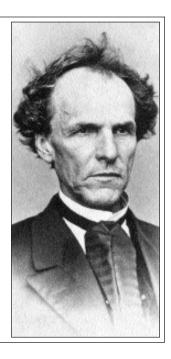
^{58.} Remarks of James Lane, January 15, 1862, Congressional Globe, 37th Cong., 2d sess., 1862, pt. 1: 335; Dudley Cornish, The Sable Arm: Black Troops in the Union Army, 1861–1865 (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 1987), 70–73; Castel, Civil War Kansas, 90–91; Speeches of Gen. J.H. Lane of Kansas, 11.

^{59.} Vindication of the Policy of the Administration, 3–4, 9.

man of the media. When he spoke in Connecticut in December 1863 the audience was surprised "to find before them a man of fair proportions, of genteel appearance, of unobtrusive manners, instead of the rough and savage animal which the anti-war papers have seen fit to represent him."60 He was married, had four children, and had experienced the death of one. Although Lane was accused of many sexual peccadilloes and once of rape, and he divorced his wife in 1856, he remarried her in 1857 and always claimed that his family was of the utmost importance to him." There are many stories of Lane's compassion, his kindness to individuals, his immunity to the temptations of money. "No night was too dark," Ingalls wrote, "no storm too wild, no heat or cold too excessive, no distance too great, to delay his meteoric pilgrimages, with dilapidated garb and equipage, across the trackless prairies from convention to convention."61 Isaac Goodnow, as upright, moral, and religious a New Englander as there ever was, thought a great deal of Lane. "It has been with the greatest interest," Goodnow wrote in 1858, "that I have carefully watched the labors & the influence of this wonderful man He is the man for the hour & fills a place in our history that no other man can."62 There was a story in Missouri that Lane was eight feet tall and breathed fire.63 His friends knew better.

hat are we to make of the claim that Lane was insane? Any amateur psychiatrist might easily conclude at least that, given his frenetic energy, wonderful glibness, and frequent "low" spells, even confinement, helpless, in bed, that he was what would now be called a manic/depressive. Abelard Guthrie noted: "There seems to me a species of insanity in some of this man's eccentricities." Another observer thought Lane "grand, gloomy and peculiar" and felt "there always appeared to

"There seems to me a species of insanity in some of this man's eccentricities."



be something weighing on his mind—something which seemed to cause him trouble."64

That last statement, at least, corresponds to many made about Lincoln. His law partner William Herndon once wrote of Lincoln that "melancholy dript from him as he walked." An early friend noted: "No element of Mr. Lincoln's character was so marked, obvious and ingrained as his mysterious and profound melancholy." Sometimes, a stranger might have thought from his behavior that Lincoln had gone insane. 65 Historian Gary Wills notes that such a Hamlet-like melancholy was—at least so long as it did not move into actual, crippling insanity—an attractive feature for Lincoln in his times, as it surely was for Lane. Leverett Spring thought Lane and Lincoln had a "noble discontent with the world" in common, but that Lincoln, unlike Lane, had "the refuge of books and their rationalizing calm." 66 Is it too much to suppose that the two men,

^{60.} Speech of General J. H. Lane at Waterbury, Conn., Dec. 28, 1863 (N.p.: Gibson Brothers, n.d.), 1, in "Kansas Collected Speeches and Pamphlets," vol. 14.

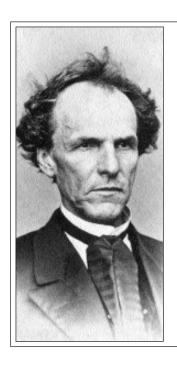
^{61.} Lane autobiography in *Kansas Crusader of Freedom* (Doniphan City), February 3, 1858. *Dictionary of American Biography*, s.v. "James H. Lane"; Connelley, *Collected Writings of John James Ingalls*, 455.

^{62. [}Isaac Goodnow] to Friend Sherman, April 1, 1858, box 2, Isaac Goodnow Collection, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

^{63.} Fish, The Grim Chieftain of Kansas, 86.

^{64.} Guthrie diary, February 27, 1862; St. Joseph (Mo.) Daily News, November 6, 1902, in "Kansas Biographical Scrapbooks," vol. 168: 117, Library and Archives Division, Kansas State Historical Society.

^{65.} Burlingame, *The Inner World of Abraham Lincoln*, 92–93. 66. Wills, *Lincoln at Gettysburg*, 74–76; Spring, "The Career of a Kansas Politician," 87, 104.



"He was a revolutionary and there wasn't any revolution."

both tall, both carelessly dressed, both homely, and both magnetic partly due to their mysterious emotional volatility, found an understanding, if not an attraction, in bouts of depression that with Lane eventually led to suicide?

Lane threatened suicide regularly, it is true. He threatened it in 1856 when friends tried to convince him not to come into Kansas. He threatened it in 1861 if the state legislature had not appointed him senator. He threatened it in 1863 rather than being taken prisoner in the Quantrill raid on Lawrence. His brother had actually killed himself.⁶⁷

Still, nearly every contemporary account of Lane's actual suicide in the summer of 1866 expressed surprise at it. He had troubles and was under investigation for fraud regarding Indian Department funds. But his depression never seemed to have come before when he was challenged: more when he was bored. "He would have defied

the King of Terrors himself," wrote a Kansas associate, "and lived in spite of fate." 68

But Lincoln was dead, and remaining loyal to the office, as Lane did in supporting President Andrew Johnson, was not the same as obeisance to a great and powerful man. Lane backed Johnson's vetoes of the Civil Rights bills that were popular in Kansas, and, to his dismay, Kansas shunned him for it. He had been besieged with office seekers at the time of his re-election to the Senate in 1864.⁶⁹ He was considered for secretary of the interior and commissioner of Indian affairs, and even had ambitions for the presidency. Then within two years, he found himself struggling for his reputation and political life, with only a president himself on the verge of impeachment to defend him.

But clearly there were other factors. One reporter, writing in 1870, blamed Lane's demise on his success and the accompanying diet. Indigestion led to sleeplessness, and the effects were cumulative. A doctor who saw Lane in St. Louis, when he collapsed on the way back to Washington and then returned to Kansas, noted that he suffered from "extreme depression of spirits" and "sinking sensations." There was numbness in his limbs when he awoke, and dizziness. "The patient was also timid and expressed himself afraid to be alone." On a train to Leavenworth, with the doctor at his side by his request, Lane asked to be committed to an insane asylum.⁷⁰

Representative Sidney Clarke of Kansas remembered: "For several weeks previous to his departure [from Washington] his mental condition excited the serious apprehension of his friends. Those who knew him best, and were conversant with his wonderful mental and physical characteristics, saw in him a change which excited their most serious apprehensions." Such comments suggest that the Lane who returned to his farm in Kansas in 1866 was not the Lane Lincoln knew.

^{67. [}Samuel Smith] Reply to 'T.W.H.' [Thomas Wentworth Higginson] in *Boston Advertiser*, printed pamphlet, March 23, 1903, Robinson Collection; *Kansas City Times*, January 29, 1894, in "Kansas Biographical Scrapbooks," vol. 79: 177–81.

^{68.} W. H. Morris, "Account of Lane's suicide," n.d., clipping file, James H. Lane Collection, Kansas Collection.

^{69.} Castel, *Civil War Kansas*, 231; M. W. Delahay to James H. Lane, November 23, 1864, Lane Collection.

^{70.} Stringfellow, "Jim Lane," 277; New York Times, July 8, 1866, 6–2. 71. Remarks of Sidney Clarke, July 18, 1866, Congressional Globe, 39th Cong., 1st sess., 1866, 36, pt. 5: 3913.

John Speer visited the senator at his farm late in June. He joked that he had heard that Lane was ill but thought he was worth a dozen dead men yet. Lane responded: "The pitcher is broken at the fountain. My life is ended." On July 1 he jumped out of a carriage in which he was riding and shot himself through the roof of his mouth.⁷²

ane, it was said, was a "man for the times." Probably that was his strength. Kansas wit Sol Miller once said that Lane had no more right to make some of his deals than "his distinguished ancestor had to promise the world to Christ." But he was no fallen angel, just a man who had lost a powerful friend and whose tumultuous world had come to an end. "He was a revolutionary," Lloyd Lewis wrote, "and there wasn't any revolution."

H. D. Fisher, preaching at Lane's funeral, emphasized that "time is the great elucidator of human intentions, as seen in human actions." For all his faults Lane had been for Kansans "dear to our hearts" as he certainly was to his friend Lincoln.⁷⁵

Lincoln commented once on the unfairness of history, as vivid personalities were swept away and survived only in pallid fragments. The "living histories" were the best examples, he said, "but those histories are gone. They can be read no more forever. They were a fortress of strength; but,

what invading foemen could never do, the silent artillery of time has done; the leveling of its walls."⁷⁶

Lewis felt the same and was disappointed that the trivia on Lane had taken over. "For after you have heard all the topsy-turvy tales about Jim Lane, even believed all the half-affectionate, half-scornful anecdotes of his stormy career, even accepted all the stories of his riff-raffish, scalawagism as partly true, you cannot laugh him off, or brush him aside. Always a figure of titanic accomplishment comes striding back through the fog."

Lane was a special casualty of time and accident and the passions he himself aroused. But asking why he appealed to Lincoln makes one wonder whether more should not be made at this distance of the remaining stump of the man who was once the king of Kansas and the lion of Washington.

Lane was, Kansan Web Wilder once said, "One of Our Things." He was someone, wrote Pomeroy, who "studied men and knew every avenue to the human heart . . . a man strong in his friendships and not less implacable in his hatreds." He was, said William Allen White "probably weak and maybe wicked, surely torn with internal conflicts—but a man!" That was doubtless what Lincoln and so many others saw in him.

^{72.} Speer, Life of Gen. James H. Lane, 315-16.

^{73. &}quot;Funeral Sermon on the Death of Gen. James H. Lane," Kansas Daily Tribune (Lawrence), July 21, 1866; Sol Miller quotation in Raymond Gaeddert, The Birth of Kansas (Lawrence: University of Kansas Press, 1940), 103.

^{74.} Kansas City Times, October 19, 1938.

^{75. &}quot;Funeral Sermon on the Death of Gen. James H. Lane."

^{76.} Quotation in Jon Lauk, "'The Silent Artillery of Time:' Understanding Social Change in the Rural Midwest," *Great Plains Quarterly* 19 (Fall 1999): 246.

^{77.} Lewis, "The Man the Historians Forgot," 91.

^{78.} Olathe Mirror, June 7, 1888; Remarks of Samuel Pomeroy, July 18, 1866, Congressional Globe, 39th Cong., 1st sess., 1866, 36, pt. 5: 3903; W. A. White, "An Old Ghost Walks," October 20, 1938, clipping file, Lane Collection.